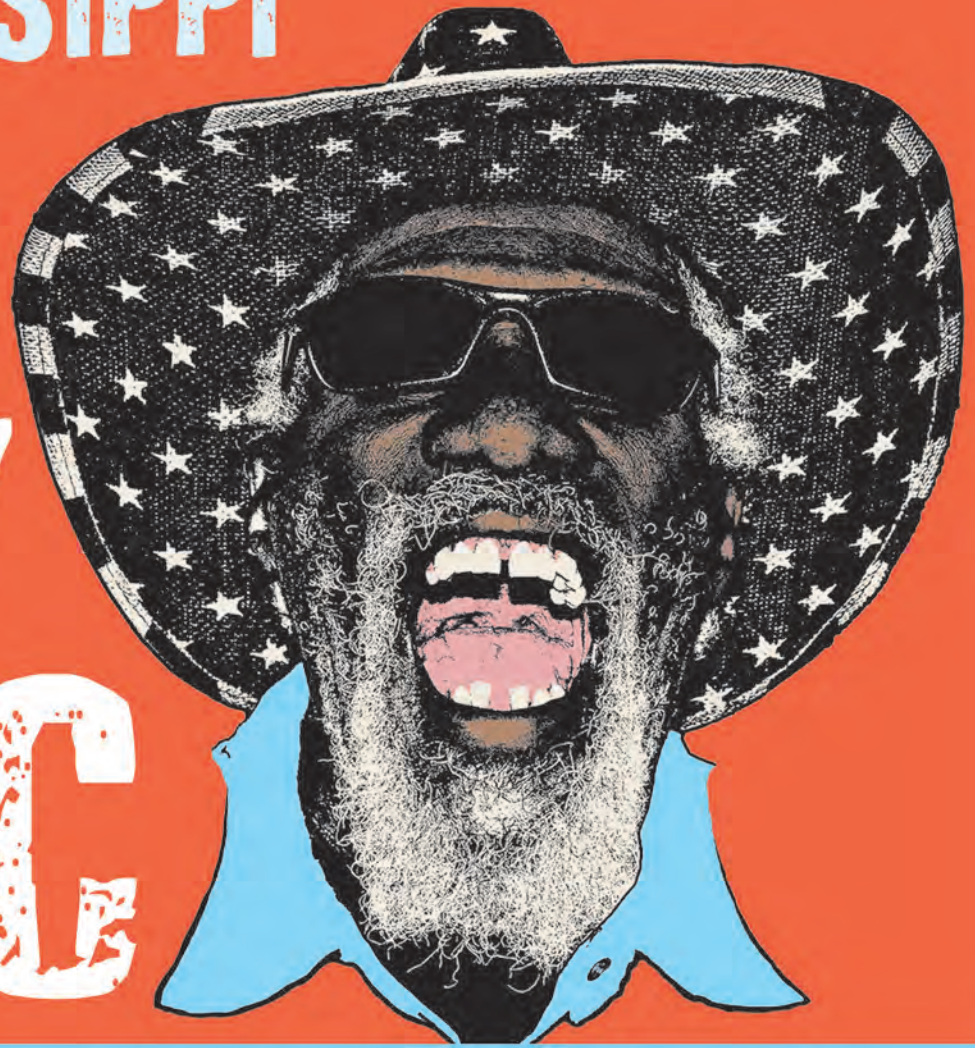


# NORTH MISSISSIPPI

# HILL COUNTRY PICNIC



THE LOCAL VOICE 2024 NORTH MISSISSIPPI HILL COUNTRY PICNIC GUIDE - FREE - WATERFORD, MISSISSIPPI - READ AT MAXIMUM VOLUME

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**JUNE 28-29 2024**



# ★ NORTH MISSISSIPPI ★ HILL COUNTRY PICNIC JUNE 28-29, 2024 • WATERFORD, MS



ARTIST  
LINE  
UP

North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic • Festival Guide • June 28-29, 2024 • NMSHillCountryPicnic.com

## Picnic Days Are Here Again!

Celebrate the Beginning of Summer with Legendary Blues

### Musicians at the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic

The goal of the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic is to enhance appreciation and educate the general public about the native art form of North Mississippi Hill Country Blues music through performance, preservation, and interpretation.

The Local Voice media company in Oxford, Mississippi is proud to partner with Sara and Kenny Brown to bring you this official festival guide. There are free souvenir printed copies around the picnic grounds and a digital download is available. Just scan the QR code on the big ass banner near the stage for more information, videos, and artists' links. See you at the Picnic!

—Newt Rayburn (Publisher) and Nature Humphries (Editor)

### WHAT TO BRING

- Bug Spray
- Blanket or chair for sitting
- Water
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Hat for shade
- Rain gear
- Shade tent
- More water!




### WHAT NOT TO BRING

- No weapons
- No glass containers will be allowed ANYWHERE on the festival site
- For safety reasons – NO motorized vehicles inside the festival (No golf carts or 4 wheelers except by event staff).
- For safety seasons – NO pets
- No professional photography equipment, please restrict photos to the first 2 songs of each artist set and NO video or audio recording.

### THE PICNIC HAS

- Portable toilets
- Showers
- Water faucets for drinking water
- Vendors will be selling various food, snacks, and beverages
- Campsites
- The largest collection of authentic Hill Country Blues musicians you can find on one stage in 2024

### TICKETS & GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Tickets are available online at [NMSHillCountryPicnic.com](http://NMSHillCountryPicnic.com) and Eventbrite.
- Online ticket sales end Wednesday, June 19 at midnight.
- All ticket sales at the gate are CASH ONLY. There is no ATM available at the festival site.
- VIP tickets must be purchased online by midnight Sunday, June 23, 2024.
- Gates open Thursday, June 27 at 5 pm. No one will be admitted early. Music goes from 4 pm till midnight on Friday and 10 am till midnight on Saturday. All Picnic attendees must be off site by Sunday, June 25 by noon—no late departures.
- Friday Only: \$25
- Saturday Only: \$25
- Camping: \$15 (Flat rate of \$15/person to spend 1-3 nights. If you spend the night you pay \$15, no cars in camp ground.) No open fires on the festival site.
- RV Fee: \$100
- Ice Chest inside festival: \$10 (NO GLASS allowed on festival site.)
- CASH ONLY – NO ATM AVAILABLE AT FESTIVAL SITE
- If you go out the ticket gate, you must have your wristband on to re-enter the festival site.
- Parking is FREE!
- Children 12 and under FREE
- Really Cool Art Vendors and Picnic Merch are available for sale on site, Picnic Merch is CASH ONLY! 

### FRIDAY JUNE 28

4PM	JOHN MCDOWELL & CHRISTINE CONLEY
4:45	78 <sup>5:45</sup> ROCKET88
6:45	ROBERT KIMBROUGH SR. BLUES CONNECTION
7:30	KUDZU KINGS
8:45	KENT BURNSIDE
10:00	ALVIN YOUNGBLOOD HART'S MUSCLE THEORY
11:15	DUWAYNE BURNSIDE

### SATURDAY JUNE 29

10AM	LITTLE JOE AYERS
11:00	MARLOW DORROUGH & FRIENDS
NOON	LIBBY RAE WATSON & BILL STEBER
1:00	DUWAYNE BURNSIDE & KENNY BROWN DUO
2:00	WOLFEAGLE FT TRENTON AYERS
3:00	AFRISISSIPPI
4:00	RISING STARS FIFE & DRUM BAND
5:15	JIMBO MATHUS
6:45	ERIC DEATON
8:00	KENNY BROWN
9:30	ROBERT FINLEY
11:00	GARRY BURNSIDE

### GUITAR WORKSHOP

Bring an acoustic guitar for a one day guitar workshop with some of the legends of Hill Country Blues. The cost is \$150 and lunch is included. This year's guitar instructors are **Kenny Brown, Garry Burnside, Little Joe Ayers,** and **Eric Deaton.**

After the workshop, DuWayne Burnside is hosting a jam at the Burnside Bar & Grill located at 645 HWY 7 North, Holly Springs. Food and beverages will be available for purchase beginning at 3:30 pm.

Sales for the workshop end on June 24.







# The Summer's Biggest Outdoor Party Is Back

by Davis Coen

As the weather starts to swelter in the Mid-South, seekers of outdoor events that celebrate culture, music, and art will begin to sense that North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic time is drawing near.

The Hill Country Picnic returns to Waterford, Mississippi, on June 28 and 29. This year we are shining our spotlight on the loyal sponsors who are key to putting on the annual event, which has generated over \$1.9M of revenue in Marshall County and the surrounding areas since 2006.

Fueled by sponsorships and fan support, the Picnic has raised funds for Historic Blues Trail markers on the Holly Springs Square honoring Hill Country blues legends R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough, among others elsewhere. Also, the organization has contributed to the burial expenses of nearly a dozen performers who have passed on.

**“The Picnic sponsors are a special part of the Picnic family; we couldn’t do without them!”**

**—Sara Brown**  
(North MS Hill Country Picnic Coordinator)

Budweiser, Cathead Distillery, Visit Mississippi, and Fat Possum Records are well-known businesses, but other companies such as the Mississippi Arts Commission, LifeWings Peak

Performance, Cetacea Sound, Inc.—or even individuals like Frank Kossen, Tom and Connie Kossen, and Ron and Misty Feder—play equally as crucial a part in pulling off the large event.

Besides an impressive line-up of some of the best blues and roots musicians around, including Alvin Youngblood Hart, Eric Deaton, Robert Finley, Jimbo Mathus, Afrissippi, Robert Kimbrough, Sr., Garry Burnside, Little Joe Ayers, Libby Rae Watson, and festival co-founder Kenny Brown—plus many notable art vendors—attention is shared this year with the sponsors who play just as important a role in the Picnic’s success.

Rock band The Black Keys are also among the number of companies, organizations, or individuals who continue to lend their invaluable support.

## The Black Keys Continue Their Support of the Picnic

It may be a little out of the ordinary to find a world-famous rock group on a list of festival sponsors, but The Black Keys have proven over the years to be just that—not ordinary in any way, shape, or form.

Throughout an industrious career, performing more than a thousand shows and producing over a dozen records, The Black Keys have managed to achieve success with both commercial and independent music fans, but just as impressively have helped North Mississippi Hill Country Blues reach a wider audience than any other mainstream artists.

In fact, although they originate from Akron, Ohio, the band has become one of Hill Country Blues music’s best ambassadors.

Despite that only guitarist/vocalist Dan Auerbach, who makes up one-half of the famously full-sounding duo, has performed live at the festival, The Black Keys’ recent role as a Picnic sponsor has proven to be as important to the whole operation as if they were playing. Particularly since getting back on track after a hiatus for Covid.

The importance of the Picnic’s mission is absolutely not lost on drummer Patrick Carney. In fact, he credits the music of R.L. Burnside for starting his musical connection with bandmate Auerbach.

Both band members had brothers who were the same age and in the same year of high school, yet

the two didn’t become friends until urged by their siblings to connect with each other.

“When Dan came over to my house, and we started talking music, he noticed that I had an R.L. 45 (RPM record), and was like ‘man, I listen to a ton of this,’” Carney recently told *The Local Voice*.

Carney, who discovered Burnside’s music through a collaboration album recorded with indie-rock band Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, titled *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, had never met anyone who shared his uncommon interest in the Hill Country blues master.

“I was the only other dude that was his age that had anything to do with that—you know, with what little knowledge I had.

The two went down into Carney’s basement and Auerbach began “basically playing R.L. riffs.”

He said Auerbach then introduced him to Junior Kimbrough’s music, as well others like T-Model Ford, from Greenville, Mississippi, who was also on the Fat Possum record label.

“That was our first musical bonding ... even on our first record, there’s a bunch of shout-outs to that music,” said Carney.

**“If it weren’t for that music there would be no Black Keys.”**  
**—Patrick Carney**

“Even as the band evolves, we always come back to it.”

He recalled in 2019, when they had just come off a big arena tour, Auerbach called him and said that Kenny Brown was in town, and that he should come by his studio Easy Eye Sound, located in Nashville.

In a matter of two days, The Black Keys and Brown, along with another Picnic mainstay, beloved Oxford guitarist, singer, and bassist, Eric Deaton, recorded what became the band’s 2021 album *Delta Kream*. Although their goal was just to jam with them, he said “it really brought us back to our roots.”





Thereafter a relationship grew between the duo and Brown, and eventually his wife Sara.

“Kenny’s the one that’s on all those records, that’s still alive,” said Carney. “He’s our OG, so it’s important for us to help out with what him and Sara are doing. We’re proud to be part of it.”

He said that the band seldom devotes such enthusiasm to a sponsorship, and that they typically lean more toward supporting youth baseball, making the Hill Country Picnic rather unique for The Black Keys.

The group’s local presence has been palpable in the last couple of years. Besides being a major sponsor of the Picnic, they also played a sold out show at **The Lyric** theater, which included Brown and Deaton joining them on stage.

It was cool, because **Oxford, Mississippi**, changed our lives,” said Carney. “That’s where we got our first big break. Our first record came out on a small label out of L.A., but the label that we always wanted to be on was Fat Possum, ya know, since we were teenagers ... and that became the beginning of a twenty-plus year relationship—signing to the label that inspired us to do it in the first place.”

Although they’ve returned multiple times since their big Oxford show, prior to that, The Black Keys hadn’t played locally since **Proud Larry’s** in the early 2000s.

Regarding the aura and energy of North Mississippi—particularly in Marshall County—where much of the great Hill Country Blues hails from, he described its intangible effect as “magical.”

Carney said that when he’s here he can “feel the history,” and that “not every place is like that.”

He likened the experience of listening to Hill Country blues music in North Mississippi to that of hearing a punk rock band like **The Ramones** while in the Lower East Side of **New York City**.

“It all makes sense. I picture what it used to be like,” he said. “Memphis has this thing, and North Mississippi does as well.” 📺

Scan the QR code on the big ass banner next to the stage to view the online guide, which has the full length interviews of artists and sponsors!

# R.L. Boyce

(August 15, 1955 – November 9, 2023)

**R.L. Boyce**, an American blues singer, songwriter, and guitarist who was born and raised in **Como, Mississippi**, sadly passed away on November 9, 2023. He was a notable figure in the world of blues music, known for his captivating performances and profound contributions to the genre.

R.L. Boyce, influenced by Hill Country Blues legends like **R. L. Burnside** and **Mississippi Fred McDowell**, embarked on his musical journey in the early 1960s as a drummer. He initially played the drums for his uncle, the fife and drum performer **Othar Turner**.

Later on, he took on the role of drummer for **Jessie Mae Hemphill**, contributing his percussion skills to her 1990 album, *Feelin’ Good*. In 2013, R.L. Boyce released

his debut album, titled *Ain’t the Man’s Alright*, which featured collaborations with notable musicians such as **Cedric Burnside**, **Luther Dickinson**, and Calvin Jackson.

His second album, *Roll and Tumble*, was launched on September 8, 2017, under the Waxploitation Records label. This album showcased the exceptional double drumming skills of both Cedric Burnside and Calvin Jackson.

The production of *Roll and Tumble* was overseen by Luther Dickinson, along with **David Katznelson**. The album received a Grammy Award nomination in 2018 in the Best Traditional Blues Album category. The cover art featured a portrait of R.L. Boyce, skillfully painted by the contemporary artist **James Jean**. 📺



Photo by Joshua Black Wilkins

## Cathead Distillery Celebrates 12 Years as Picnic Sponsor

by Davis Coen

**Jackson, Mississippi**-based **Cathead Distillery**, known about as much for supporting live music as they are for their popular variety of spirits, joins the list of returning sponsors for the 2024 North MS Hill Country Picnic.

Cathead puts on a wide variety of events at their spacious home base in Jackson, which comfortably accommodates both indoor and outdoor live shows. These include the annual **Cathead Jam**, which hosts some of the country’s hottest “jam” bands, as well as enormous crawfish boils and fish fries.

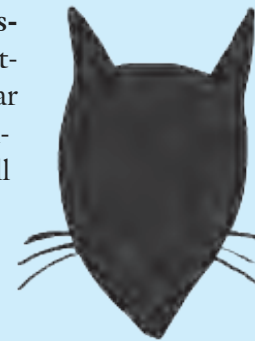
But Cathead also helps put on events elsewhere, and their iconic name and logo (originated by **Clarksdale, Mississippi**, bluesman **Pat Thomas**) have become practically ubiquitous throughout the area. Also, their eye-catching swag, varying from t-shirts and hats to stickers, seems to be stuck on the walls of about every liquor store and bar around the state.

“To be able to partner with a non-profit like the Hill Country Picnic, and truly support authentic roots music in a very positive way, means a lot to us,” said Cathead co-founder and Mississippi native **Austin Evans**.

“The festival itself carries a lot for the music of the region, and it’s put on in one of the most genuine manners that any could achieve, in my opinion,” he said.

Evans, who began a relationship with the festival first as a patron, said that it wasn’t before too long that he began to gain an “understanding of what they’re achieving,” and the “importance of partnering with the Picnic, and Kenny and Sara Brown.”

About to embark on their twelfth year as a sponsor, Evans reflected back on the early days



of his distillery’s partnership with the Picnic.

“When Cathead goes to sponsor events, we really look towards the mission statement, and the direction or the purpose, and this one checks all of the boxes,” he said. “It’s perfect for us, as appreciators of the blues and the roots of Mississippi music.”

What also makes their relationship with the Picnic special for Cathead is that it’s one of the only sponsorships they participate in where they don’t actually sell their beverages to patrons.

Above all, Evans and the rest of the Cathead family—including other co-founder **Richard Patrick**—are fans of the music, and quite enjoy being in attendance. The pair can usually be found soaking in the atmosphere and holding court from their very welcoming VIP tent at stage side.

Being a lifelong music lover, Evans had some difficulty picking a favorite band or act from his many times in attendance, but he regards last year’s headlining performance by legendary blues harmonica player **Charlie Musselwhite** as a standout.

“To witness his appreciation, respect, and commitment to blues firsthand,” Evans said, “I mean, he played well over his set allowance time, which was awesome. It was a really cool thing that happened out there last year.”

Evans also remarked that the communal jams led by **Kenny Brown** are always among his personal highlights, as well as the people who attend.

“The kind and thoughtful people that are always in attendance,” he said. “Everybody looks out for each other and it’s a very family-oriented environment.” 📺



# Friday, June 28, 2024 Hill Country Picnic Lineup



Robert Chaffe of Kudzu Kings.

## 4–4:30 pm JOHN MCDOWELL & CHRISTINE CONLEY

While their love of music began long before their love for each other, **Christine Conley** and **John McDowell** have combined the two to create fun and inspiring songs that will leave you smiling.

## 4:45–5:30 pm **78**

**78** combines influences from the North Mississippi Hill Country Blues, pre-war Memphis, and the funky side of Americana. Hailing from Memphis and North Mississippi, **78** brings classic juke blues and originals. Shake 'Em!

## 5:45–6:30 pm **ROCKET 88**

**Rocket 88** was formed in the summer of 2005 and has since brought its Mississippi-soaked sound to venues all over the Southeast. **Rosamond Posey** (vocals, rhythm guitar), **Jamie Posey** (vocals, lead guitar, harmonica), and **Nathan Robbins** (bass, vocals) make up the core.

## 6:45–7:15 pm **ROBERT KIMBROUGH SR.** BLUES CONNECTION

**Robert Kimbrough Sr** continues the **Cotton Patch Soul Blues** style created by his father, the legendary **Junior Kimbrough**. From an early age, Robert was steeped in the sounds and life of North Mississippi and its distinctive style of blues.

## 7:45 pm **KUDZU KINGS**

The **Kudzu Kings**, hailing from Oxford, Mississippi, are renowned for their eclectic blend of Rock, Country, and Southern Roots music. Formed in the mid-1990s, the band quickly gained a loyal following with their infectious melodies, tight harmonies, and high-energy performances. Drawing inspiration from their Southern surroundings, the Kudzu Kings infuse their music with a distinctive sense of place, capturing the essence of small-town life in the Deep South. With a knack for storytelling and a laid-back charm, the band's songs often celebrate the quirks and idiosyncrasies of Southern Culture while exploring universal themes of love, longing, and the passage of time. Over the years, the Kudzu Kings have become beloved fixtures of Oxford's music scene, embodying the spirit of community and camaraderie that defines the vibrant landscape of Mississippi.

## 8:45–9:45 PM **KENT BURNSIDE**

**Kent Burnside**, grandson of the iconic bluesman **R.L. Burnside**, carries on his family's musical tradition with passion and authenticity. Hailing from

Holly Springs, Mississippi, **Kent** learned the blues from his grandfather and other local musicians, soaking in the raw energy and emotional depth of the Hill Country blues style. With his gritty vocals, soulful guitar playing, and driving rhythms, **Kent** channels the spirit of his forebears while infusing his own modern twist into the genre. Embracing the raw and unfiltered essence of the blues, **Kent Burnside** mesmerizes audiences with his electrifying performances, keeping the flame of Mississippi blues burning bright for new generations to discover and cherish.

## 10–11 pm **ALVIN YOUNGBLOOD HART'S MUSCLE THEORY**

**Alvin Youngblood Hart** is a virtuoso guitarist and multi-instrumentalist deeply rooted in the blues tradition. Hailing from California but steeped in the rich musical heritage of Mississippi, **Hart's** style effortlessly blends Delta blues, country, rock, and folk influences into a captivating tapestry of sound.

Throughout his career, **Alvin Youngblood Hart** has garnered critical acclaim and earned numerous accolades, including a Grammy Award for Best Traditional Blues Album. He is known for his technical prowess on the guitar, seamlessly shifting between slide and fingerstyle playing with precision and flair.

With a discography spanning over two decades and collaborations with luminaries like **Taj Mahal** and **Ben Harper**, **Alvin Youngblood Hart** continues to inspire and influence generations of musicians with his unparalleled talent and unwavering dedication to the craft.

## 11:15 pm–12:15 am **DUWAYNE BURNSIDE**

**DuWayne Burnside**, son of the legendary bluesman **R.L. Burnside**, carries on his father's musical legacy while carving out his own distinctive path in the blues world.

**DuWayne** grew up immersed in the sounds of Hill Country blues, learning from his father and other local musicians. He inherited **R.L.'s** raw, hypnotic style but has evolved it with his own modern sensibilities, infusing elements of funk, soul, and rock into his music.

**DuWayne Burnside** has collaborated with artists like **North Mississippi Allstars** and **Cedric Burnside** to keep the Hill Country blues tradition alive and thriving. With albums like *Under Pressure* and *Bout 2 Get Wild*, **DuWayne** continues to captivate listeners with his electrifying performances and soul-stirring songs, ensuring that the Burnside family's musical legacy remains a vital force in the blues landscape. **TV**



Robert Kimbrough Sr.



Kent Burnside.



Alvin Youngblood Hart.



DuWayne Burnside. All photos on this page by Tim Hardiman.





## Sponsor Spotlight

# Richard Doss

**LifeWings**  
PEAK PERFORMANCE

Memphis connection through mutual musical links to places like **Ardent Studios** and **Jim Dickinson**. Soon enough Doss and a group of friends began making regular trips to Mississippi and Memphis, and the **Juke Joint Festival** in **Clarksdale**, where he first met **Sara** and **Kenny Brown**.

Because of his previous work, Doss felt it was a fitting segue to additional philanthropy by supporting the **North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic**.

“A lot of our healthcare work ... in hospitals and clinics was inner-city work, so when we had a chance to help Sara and be part of the music, that was a natural tie-in ... and that was very exciting to meet more people and be able to help.” In addition to sponsoring the Picnic, his company has also endowed funds to the **Holly Springs School District**.

In light of the Picnic’s goal of enhancing appreciation and educating the public, Doss feels his company’s ability to lend financial support is only part of the larger mission. “Participation and word of mouth getting as many people down there as possible ... As a sponsor, we want to make sure we’re spreading the word.”

To that end, he has also been involved in curating a YouTube channel, **North South Central Live**, featuring videos of concerts that he credits to boosting the music’s popularity in Minnesota.

The channel has “a lot of different kinds of music, but it’s very heavily driven towards Americana and Blues and Deep Blues ...and of course everything

Hill Country related,” Doss said. “That’s been really good for the for the fan base in Minnesota, too, making sure we get promotion and get ... people to those shows so they can experience and have a little more knowledge.”

“The other thing that we’ve enjoyed is being around the musicians and hearing the stories of the different histories and the different collaborations,” he added.

Doss said he appreciated the environment and structure of the Picnic that make it possible for fans to become immersed in the Hill Country culture. With its intimate atmosphere and close-knit community, both artists and attendees alike can experience the joy of gathering with a mutual love and appreciation of the music.

“You can get down close in, and you can be off to the side, or wherever you want to be,” said Doss. “It’s just incredible music and it’s varied. **Charlie Musselwhite** last year was incredible, and we’re going to have **Robert Finley** this year, and it really tells that story. One of the big things that I see is that it’s pushing the word out in a great venue with great acts. Everyone’s there for a reasonable price, having a good time, and you don’t see a lot of corporate interference.”

From the top of the Mississippi River in Minnesota to the bottom of the Delta at the Gulf of Mexico, Richard Doss & LifeWings Peak Performance are helping to spread the Hill Country love, and we are thankful for his enthusiastic support.

**Richard Doss** lives in **Minneapolis, Minnesota**, but also spends much of his time in **California** serving as Managing Director of **LifeWings Peak Performance**, a Minneapolis- and California-based consulting company that works with hospitals and underserved schools to improve infrastructure, especially air quality.

Doss first became familiar with **Mississippi** during his career working in the paper, pulp, and wood products industry in the 1990s. Back in Minneapolis, his brother’s band mate, **Tony Nelson**, who is one of the top rock photographers in the area, introduced him to several music industry people.

“There was a place called Bayport BBQ that would have the Burnsides and Kenny Brown and many others come up and play there ... in the early 2000s.”

But it was a 2013 **North Mississippi Allstars** show that would lead him back to the South. After meeting **Luther** and **Cody Dickinson**, Doss found a

# Sponsor Spotlight: Mississippi Arts Commission

As the official grantmaking and service agency for the arts in our state, **The Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC)** provides financial assistance for programming and education throughout Mississippi. We recently spoke with **Maria Zeringue**, the Folk and Traditional Arts Director at MAC.

**What can you tell us about MAC’s involvement with the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic?** MAC has been involved since almost the very beginning ... through our grants program. We offer grants every year to organizations who do arts-based activities for the community, and festivals are a huge part of our grants project applicant pool. We love funding these types of festivals.

The North Mississippi Hill Country picnic falls in my program, which ... highlights Mississippi’s heritage and culture, the traditional art forms.

**Have you ever attended any of the Picnics?** Yes ... and I had a great time. It’s such a beautiful part of the state ... you’re just surrounded by nature. Your cell phone doesn’t really work all that well—at least mine didn’t—which allows you to be present and tune into the music.

I really got the sense that they treat their musicians

and all the artists, everyone involved in the festival really, really well. I was very impressed. Something else that I noticed, being backstage and being behind the scenes, is how important the festival is for the musicians and the performers.

Because they get a chance to just hang out with each other. You know, they’re chatting. They’re sharing stories. They’re making memories. And I think that’s a huge part of the preservation work that goes into the festival. It’s not just showcasing this on stage for the audience—they do a great job of that—but I also think it’s that time backstage where the musicians can just hang out and chat with each other and just kind of catch up. I just thought that was really special.

**It is. That’s what a lot of the musicians have told me, too, when I ask them about what makes the picnic special. There is a family atmosphere almost like a reunion.**

Yes, and while I was there I was ... also out in the audience, too, because I wanted to check out

the festival just as an audience member. And the stage area is nice. There’s a lot of tree cover to cool off in the shade because it is during a hot part of the year. You know, it’s just a great place to spend the weekend.

**Absolutely. The festival has been getting, in my opinion, better and better every year thanks to support from folks like the Arts Commission and the many sponsors they have.**

We’re proud to support things like this. Kenny Brown being a founder ... [he] grew up in this tradition, you know, learning from RL Burnside and a lot of the other legends of Hill Country Blues music. He has an intimate knowledge of this. He’s a musician. It’s really important for them to carry on this tradition and they have a lot of respect for it. The lineup is the second, third generation of all these legendary Blues performers. So they’re keeping the children and the grandchildren and the great grandchildren of these musicians there, keeping their story alive through the festival. I just think it’s really cool.





# Saturday, June 29, 2024 Hill Country Picnic Lineup

10–10:45 am

## LITTLE JOE AYERS

Earl “Little Joe” Ayers is a guitarist and singer from Lamar, Mississippi, who plays Hill Country blues. He was the bass player for legendary Cotton Patch Soul blues musician Junior Kimbrough, and the two played house parties together as teenagers. Ayers is known for his elegant guitar playing and soulful voice, and often performs covers in the style of R.L. Burnside or T-Model Ford.

11–11:45 am

## MARLOW DURROUGH & FRIENDS

Marlow Dorrough is a drummer and guitarist from Ruleville, Mississippi. He is the son of legendary Mississippi guitarist Duff Dorrough. He has played with Duff Dorrough & The Revelators, Solar Porch, Brad MoneyMaker Band, Lawdogs, and more.

NOON–12:15 pm

## LIBBY RAE WATSON & BILL STEBER

Libby Rae Watson is an authentic blues woman who has been playing since the early 1970s, when she discovered the blues in her hometown of Pascagoula. She helped organize the talent for the very first Delta Blues Festival in Greenville, Mississippi, in 1978. Libby Rae has played many festivals and music venues all over the world.

1–1:45 pm

## DUWAYNE BURNSIDE & KENNY BROWN DUO

R.L. Burnside’s oldest son teams up with R.L.’s adopted son for this electric duo that is sure to get you off your seat and on your feet.

2–2:45 pm

## WOLFEAGLE FT. TRENTON AYERS

Trenton Ayers has been playing guitar since age four. The son of Earl “Little Joe” Ayers, he has played with The Electric Mudd, Cedric Burnside Project, and more. He was nominated for a GRAMMY in 2015.

3–3:45 pm

## AFRISSIPPI

Afrissippi is an afro-beat/blues/experimental band based out of Oxford, Mississippi, with Guelel Kumba (voice and guitar), Eric Deaton (guitar and voice), Kinney Kimbrough (drums) Justin Showah (bass), and Papa Assane M’baye (handdrum). Guelel Kumba comes from the Futa Tooro region of West Africa, and is a member of the Fulani people. “The blues is close to my music. The lyrics are different, but the emotions are the same,” he says. “I loved the melodies but I was too young to understand the anguish yet.”

4–5 pm

## RISING STARS FIFE & DRUM BAND

Traditional fife and drum music is a vanishing American folk music tradition derived from country blues, martial music tradition, and African rhythms. The late Otha Turner founded the Rising Star Fife & Drum Band, which is now led by his granddaughter Shardé Thomas.

5:15–6:30 pm

## JIMBO MATHUS

Jimbo Mathus is a multifaceted musician whose career spans genres from blues and Americana to rock and country. Born in Oxford, he grew up in Mississippi, deeply influenced by the rich musical heritage of the region. Mathus gained prominence as a founding member of the swing revival band Squirrel Nut Zippers in the 1990s.

6:45–8 pm ERIC DEATON

Eric Deaton is a torch-bearer of the North Mississippi Hill Country blues tradition, having received an apprenticeship first-hand from the masters of this particularly hypnotic, backwoods strain of blues. Eric has recorded albums with The Black Keys and Hank Williams, Jr. Eric’s band includes Junior Kimbrough’s son Kenny and bass guitarist Nate Robbins

8–9:15 pm

## KENNY BROWN

Kenny Brown is a highly respected blues musician renowned for his mastery of Mississippi Hill Country blues. Born and raised in Nesbit, Mississippi, Brown honed his skills playing alongside legends like Mississippi Fred McDowell and R.L. Burnside. His unique blend of traditional blues with elements of rock and punk has earned him a dedicated following and critical acclaim. Brown’s distinctive style, characterized by raw, hypnotic rhythms and blistering slide guitar work, pays homage to the rich musical heritage of the Mississippi Delta while pushing the boundaries of the genre.



Guelel Kumba of Afrissippi.

9:30–10:45 pm ROBERT FINLEY

Robert Finley is a captivating blues musician whose soulful voice and heartfelt songwriting have earned him widespread acclaim. Born in Louisiana, Finley’s journey to the spotlight was unconventional; he spent decades working as a carpenter and performing music locally before being discovered by Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys. Auerbach recognized Finley’s immense talent and signed him to his Easy



Robert Finley.

Eye Sound label, where he released his debut album, *Age Don’t Mean a Thing*, at the age of 63.

Finley’s music channels the raw emotion and authenticity of classic blues while infusing it with his own unique flair. His powerful vocals, reminiscent of legends like Otis Redding and Al Green, effortlessly convey a lifetime of experiences, from love and heartbreak to resilience and

redemption. With his gritty guitar playing and soul-stirring lyrics, Robert Finley continues to mesmerize audiences around the world, proving that age is no barrier to creating timeless music.

11 pm–midnight  
GARRY BURNSIDE



Garry Burnside.

Garry Burnside is an accomplished blues musician hailing from the storied Burnside family, a lineage renowned in the world of Mississippi blues. The son of the legendary R.L. Burnside, Garry has carved out his own niche while honoring his father’s legacy. His guitar playing is distinguished by a raw, powerful style that evokes the rugged spirit of the Delta, and his performances are a testament to his

deep-rooted connection to the genre. Throughout his career, he has collaborated with a variety of artists and bands, including the Burnside Exploration and the North Mississippi Allstars, showcasing his versatility and deep understanding of the blues.

In addition to his work as a performer, Garry Burnside is also committed to preserving and promoting the blues. He has participated in numerous educational initiatives and workshops, aiming to inspire a new generation of musicians to appreciate and continue the traditions of the Mississippi blues. Through his dedication to both his craft and his heritage, Garry Burnside not only upholds the legacy of his famous father but also ensures that the soulful sounds of the Mississippi blues will continue to resonate with audiences for years to come. **TV**



# Longtime Picnic Friend and Sponsor John McDowell Becomes Part of the Official Lineup

For over forty years, Memphis/Atlanta-based Cetacea Sound, Inc., has been on the front edge of mobile communications in the United States, and offered in-house capabilities for “total wireless system development,” intended for large trucks.

Cetacea co-owner and Memphis native John McDowell, also a longtime musician who plays mostly acoustic instruments alongside partner Christine Conley, has graced the Hill Country Picnic stage for over a half a decade, but only for Saturday morning breakfast.

2024 will mark the first year that McDowell joins the official music line-up, as the duo kicks off the festival at 4 pm, Friday, June 28.

“These two folks are kind enough to let me play there, but I’m pretty sure it’s because I’m a sponsor,” McDowell joked about organizers Sara and Kenny Brown, who are also his longtime neighbors.

“For some reason this year they moved me to the opening act,” he said modestly. “My girlfriend and I are just two old singer-songwriters. We just love doing it.”

McDowell’s admiration for the Browns also extends beyond just their annual event. “I love Kenny’s music. I wish I could play like that but I’m not capable of getting that loud,” he said, with a chuckle.

He also reflected that “blues was brought up on the fields, and the porch. Local people doing a simple thing.” Then he added, “we kind of slide away from that, and Kenny and Sara are trying to bring it back.”

He also expressed admiration for the general goal of the event, as it reads in the mission statement.

“The fact that they’re working with young folks too—it’s wonderful,” said McDowell.

He said that his favorite memory from the many Picnics he’s attended over the years was a great reaction he got from a lady in the audience, after playing his own original song called “Together Again.”

She approached the stage “with a tear in her eye,” McDowell said.

“That song was beautiful. You made me cry,” she told him. “As a writer, a compliment doesn’t get much higher than that,” he added.

“It’s just the energy that Kenny and the other younger guys bring to the stage. I’m way out of that energy, so it amazes me. People love it, and you can tell it by the crowd. They eat it up.” **TV**

John McDowell & Christine Connelly. Photo by Tim Hardiman



## Sponsor Spotlight

# Ron Feder

**R&B Feder Charitable Foundation for the Beaux-Arts** is a private organization founded by **Ron Feder**, based in **Ocean Springs, Mississippi**. Besides being one of the first sponsors of the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic, they have also awarded grants to many Mississippi arts organizations. We had a conversation recently with Ron about his involvement with the Picnic.

### You’re down in Ocean Springs, is that right?

That’s right. I have a second home in Oxford. I graduated from Ole Miss undergrad in ’74, then law school in ’81. In 2001 my daughter graduated from high school and chose Ole Miss for her undergrad, [where she met] a number of people from Marshall County, and ... a musician named Kenny Brown.

We had a party at the house in 2003. That photograph I sent you, Kenny Brown and Cedric Burnside, played in my backyard in Oxford the Friday night before the Ole Miss–LSU football game.



Photo courtesy of Ron Feder.

I got to know Kenny and Sara, and I knew a lot about the Delta Blues. I’m from Vicksburg, and I’ve been to the Delta ... but I had never heard of this North Mississippi Hill Country sound. I’d never heard of RL Burnside or Junior Kimbrough.

I’ve been involved with supporting some non-profit Blues operations in Clarksdale, and one day ... Sara says, “I’m thinking about creating a 501(c) (3) that focuses on the Hill Country sound,” and I said I support that. So I was one of her initial

sponsors, and then hooked her up with a lawyer there in Oxford, Tommy Freeland, [who] did the paperwork and got them incorporated as 501(c) (3). Sara is a brilliant manager and administrator, because putting on a festival is a lot of work.

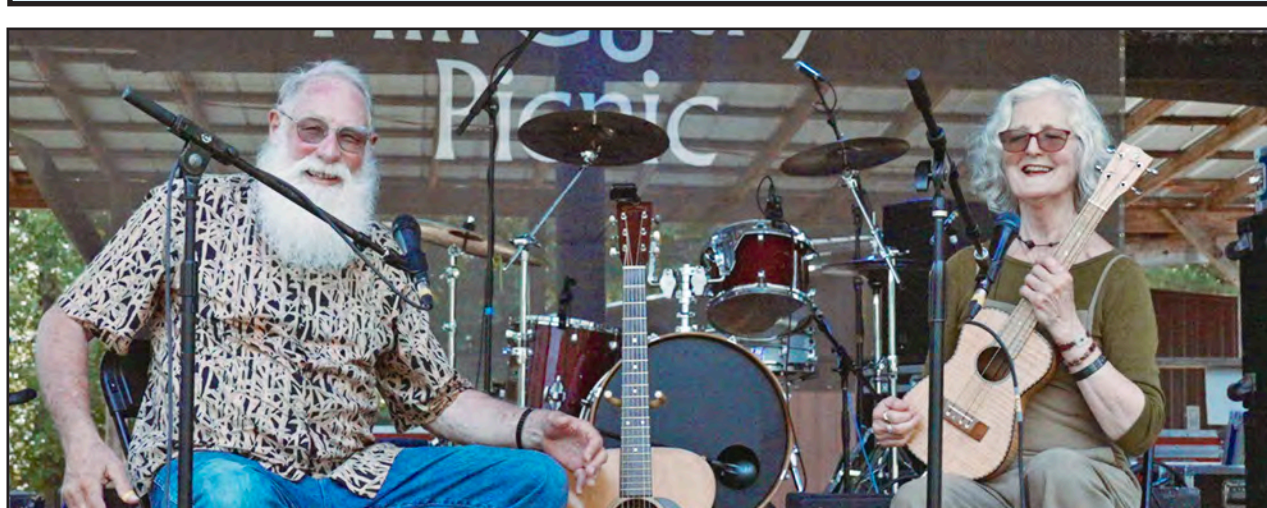
### What is it about the mission of the picnic that compels you to continue your support over the years?

I think it is a truly unique variation on the Blues theme. Whereas the Delta Blues was more or less focused on the peculiar nature of the African American experience on plantations in the Mississippi Delta, the Hill Country is not a plantation country. It’s hardscrabble red clay soil. You gotta work hard to grow stuff ... so it is that unique subset of the Blues, and I think it’s more upbeat because it’s not connected to the plantation system. The music is kind of almost a hypnotic trance-like set of beats. And it also of course features the drum and fife thing that Otha Turner developed, which is a totally unique kind of sound that [Otha’s] granddaughter has continued.

[What’s] really incredible is the reach of this style of music. I find it very interesting that it’s so popular in Europe. You go to the Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, you will hear a lot of European voices there, especially from Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia.

### What sort of changes or improvements do you see happening in the future for the festival?

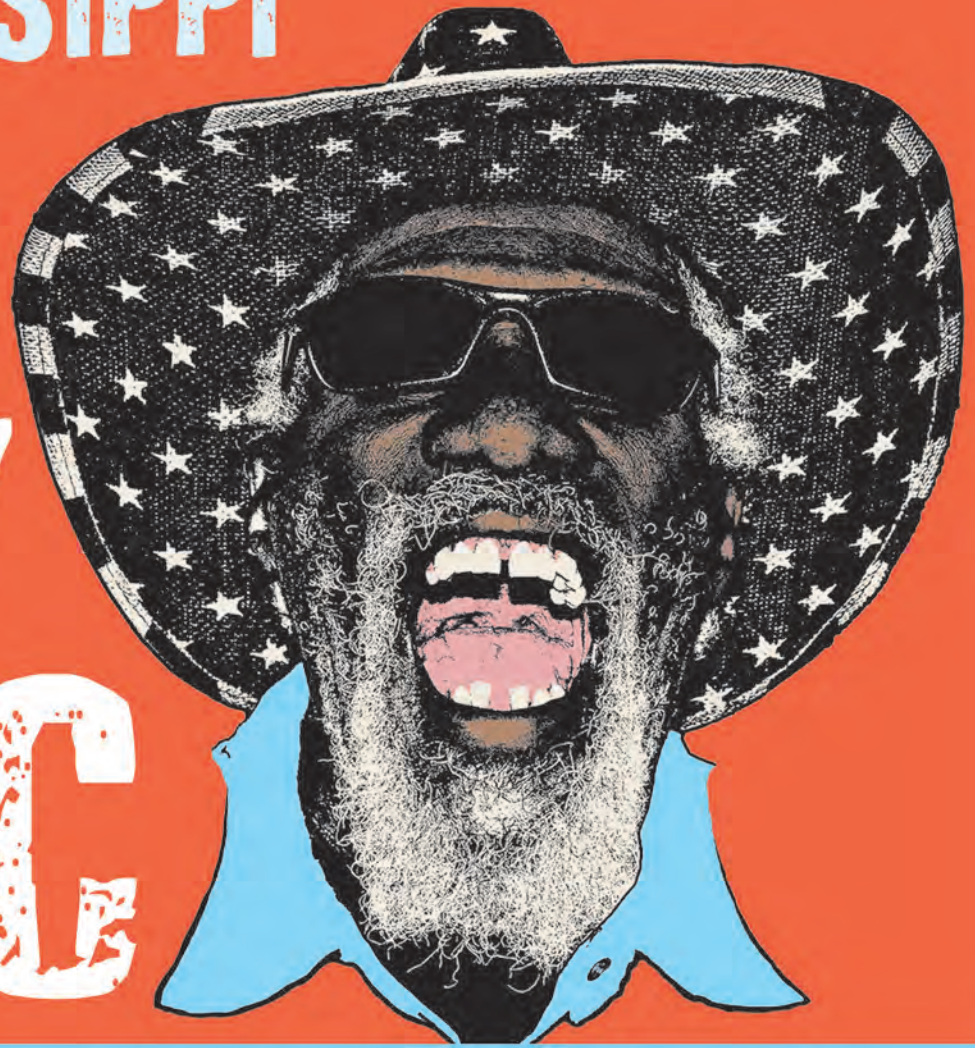
I think Sara will continue to improve on the infrastructure there; each year she learns a little more and has expanded the quality of the facilities ... and [VIP ticket holders and] sponsors can stay in that covered pavilion on top of the hill. And that is absolutely a great place to watch the whole show, unless you want to get down in the crowd and do some dancing, which will happen with me from time to time. **TV**





# NORTH MISSISSIPPI

# HILL COUNTRY PICNIC



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